"How consumers assess retailer brand substitution strategy: Impact of perceived similarity and consumer attachment"

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HOW CONSUMERS ASSESS RETAILER BRAND SUBSTITUTION STRATEGY: IMPACT OF PERCEIVED SIMILARITY AND CONSUMER ATTACHMENT

Abstract

The objective of this study is to examine how consumers assess brand substitution strategies implemented by retailers, focusing specifically on the transition from Promogro to MG (Magasin Général) retailer brand. A quantitative study involving 351 Tunisian customers who regularly patronize supermarkets (Promogro and MG) was conducted to test hypotheses and analyze the impact of various factors in April 2022. The research model was evaluated through structural equation modeling (SEM) using the AMOS 22 software. The results indicate a negative correlation between consumers' attachment to the old retail brand and their attitude toward the brand substitution process ($\beta = -0.09^*$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, perceptions of the retailer brand emerged as a significant mediating factor influencing the relationship between attitudes and consumers' intention to revisit the new retailer brand ($\beta = 0.29^{**}$, confidence interval [0.17; 0.51]). Additionally, the study found that the association between consumer attachment and perceptions of the new retailer brand is positively moderated by perceived similarity ($\beta = 0.226$, $p = 0.00$). Specifically, when there is a high degree of resemblance between the two retailer brands, customers with a stronger attachment to the former brand tend to have a more favorable perception of the new retailer brand. This study provides valuable insights for managers, helping them identify critical success criteria that facilitate customer acceptance of brand changes and offering guidance on effectively substituting retailer brand names.

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INTRODUCTION

These days, substituting retailer brand names for another is a typical managerial tactic (Kannou et al., 2024). Although the replacement of an initial retailer brand with a new one is a widely adopted phenomenon, there is limited academic research focusing on this topic (Delassus & Mogos Descotes, 2018). For example, the mobile operator Tunisiana became Ooredoo. Similarly, the Carrefour group opted to rationalize its portfolio, concentrating on a unified global brand. The multinational corporation adopted the name "Carrefour" to refer to its several store brands (e.g., Champion – Carrefour Market, Shopi – Carrefour Contact or Carrefour City, Proxi – Carrefour Express).

These changes, representing significant financial and commercial stakes, seem to underscore the new importance attributed to the retailer's brand name (Collange & Bonache, 2015). Indeed, retailer brand substitution is increasingly leading retailers to emphasize their name and give it genuine brand status. In this way, the retailer brand name becomes a transversal brand that, depending on the situation, sup-

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ports or replaces the specific retailer brands. Beyond external growth operations and the desire to build a strong brand, there are many specific reasons for retailer brand name changes (Delattre, 2006). Whether it is to rejuvenate the retailer brand, convey a new message, get rid of a past full of difficulties or a disastrous reputation, underline a desire for modernization, or mark a new beginning after difficulties, change seems closely linked to identity and image issues. Some retailer brands effectively succeed in presenting new brand images to their customers, whereas others encounter challenges in gaining approval or acceptance from their loyal customer base during such transitions.

This approach does carry some risks, though, and the company may suffer greatly as a result since it affects how loyal customers of the old retailer brand, who are presumably the most attached to it, may be the most "resistant" to change (Delassus et al., 2014; Ahmed & Ben Rached, 2024; Kannou et al., 2024). Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how consumers evaluate the substitution processes and find potential indicators of substitution success. Managers must be cautious while using substitution strategies to avoid upsetting the devoted clientele that already exists.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Brand name substitution consists of suddenly (big bang) or smoothly (cross-fade) abandoning the name of a brand (initial brand) for another brand (target brand) (Lai & Isabelle, 2016). According to Collange (2008), brand substitution is defined as "the replacement of at least one of the verbal denominations by another, accompanied by the disappearance of the previous denomination." These two definitions apply equally to product substitution and retailer substitution. This strategy most often involves abandoning the old brand in favor of a new brand with a renewed spirit and a relevant link to the market.

Brand name substitution covers a wide range of heterogeneous cases (Collange, 2008; Kapferer, 2007). In some cases, they consist of a mere restructuring of the products' nominal identity with a surety (chocolate Club renamed Maestro Club) or a simplification (Panzani's Spaghetti Cooked Sauces, now simply called Panzani). For others, they consist of a brand substitution, which involves abandoning an initial brand name and replacing it with new that already exists (food retailer Promogro renamed MG: Magasin général) or that is completely unknown locally (oil company Oilibya has been called Ola Energy since 2018).

Indeed, most changes seem to be essential to optimize the brand portfolio (Aaker, 2003; Hill et al., 2005; Keller, 2007). The same goals apply to retailer brands (e.g., Carrefour) as they do to product brands (e.g., Nestlé). However, the marketing literature has shown that retailer-brand substitution is more complex to implement than product brand substitution (Collin-Lachaud et al., 2012). It is distinguished from product name substitution by the scope of change and the different degrees of intervention involved (store remodeling, increase in references, changes to assortments, pooled advertising communication, and loyalty programs). In the retailer brand substitution case, the customer is led to live the change in a much more intense and varied way than in the context of product brand substitution, which makes it more complex for customers to develop attitudes toward this change (Ahmed & Ben Rached, 2024). Subsequently, the success of a retailer brand substitution is primarily attributed to the engagement of the staff, a more challenging factor to control compared to the tangible factors associated with product brand substitution. Staff attachment to the culture of the old retailer brand can thus constitute a factor of resistance to change (Collin-Lachaud et al., 2012).

Brand attachment is described as "a psychological variable that reflects a sustained and unalterable affective relationship (separation is painful) with the brand and expresses a relationship of psychological closeness to it" (Lacoeuilhe, 2000, p. 66). This definition refers to the painful separation: for someone who has a strong brand attachment, stopping consuming it is particularly difficult as they have a psychological closeness with it, based not only on its functional aspects but also on emotional criteria. The brand is,

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therefore, perceived as a partner whose separation would be unpleasant.

Consumers who have an emotional attachment to a brand are more likely to view it favorably (Ramaswami et al., 2016), believe it to be unique, and be more motivated to maintain their relationship (Bagozzi et al., 2017). Conversely, the separation between a brand and the individual represents a risk that may lead the individual to develop resistance behavior (Bolhuis et al., 2018). More specifically, consumers who have a strong emotional attachment to the brand will experience significant dissatisfaction if it disappears.

Similar to brand attachment, retailer brand attachment can be characterized by a robust and enduring emotional relationship between the consumer and a particular retailer (Brocato et al., 2015). While retailer brand attachment can foster consumer commitment and loyalty, it is likely the source of resistance behavior that may arise when retailer brands are substituted. Accordingly, when a retailer brand is substituted, attachment to the old retailer brand may act as a barrier to the adoption of the new retailer brand, upsetting the special relationship that has been built with the old retailer brand (Collin-Lachaud et al., 2012; Delassus et al., 2014; Collange, 2015).

Attachment to the initial retailer brand expresses a powerful relationship of proximity, and the perception of a lower risk of separation leads to negative perceptions and attitudes toward the new brand. Consequently, the retailer brand risks losing its customers. One assumes that consumers with a strong attachment to the old retailer brand are likely to harbor more negative perceptions and attitudes toward any changes, whereas those less attached are inclined to display more favorable attitudes and perceptions about the change.

Brand perception has been viewed as the conceptual antecedent of brand value to the customer, fostering positive reactions to marketing strategies (Keller, 1993). Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) contend that someone's initial perception or belief about a brand can be thought of as their cognitive reaction to that brand. In this study, the perception of the new retailer brand name after the change can be seen as the cognitive evaluation of customers toward this retailer brand.

As evidenced by Salinas and Pérez (2009), consumer attitudes about brand extensions directly affect how consumers perceive stretched brands. Therefore, attitudes about retailer brand substitution will have the same impact on customers' perceptions following a retailer brand change. It is crucial to understand how customers' attitudes toward retailer brand substitution can affect their perceptions, even though it is widely accepted that effective strategies can enhance customers' perceptions of brands and bolster brand equity (Keller, 1999). Although brand perceptions were initially used by Andrews and Kim (2007) to evaluate the effectiveness of a retailer brand substitution strategy, they did not account for the potential impact of customers' affective responses to the innovative brand on their perceptions of the change.

In addition, it is argued that consumer behavior is fundamentally determined by perceptions of a brand (Ramaditya, 2018). Keller (1993) highlights that favorable beliefs about a brand can elicit responses from consumers, including brand choice and purchase decisions. Customers tend to exhibit higher behavioral intentions and respond favorably to brand perception, pricing, merchandise, and advertising strategies when a brand has a strong value, which leads to higher buying intentions. As per Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995), consumer perceptions are identified as one of the primary antecedents of behavioral intentions.

Numerous studies illustrate that consumers' behavioral reactions to a certain brand, including brand choice, purchase intentions, readiness to spread the word about that brand, and willingness to approve of its brand extensions, are positively influenced by attitudes and perceptions about that brand (Park & Srinivasan, 1994; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Faircloth et al. (2001) further suggest that specific positive associations and brand image can elicit favorable customer behavior toward brands. Similar to these studies, Hellier et al. (2003) provide empirical confirmation that customers' intentions to repurchase can be strengthened by a positive brand perception. Despite a wealth of evidence in the marketing literature demonstrating the favorable influence of brand perceptions on behavioral intentions, there has been limited prior research investigating the link between behavioral intentions and brand perceptions in the context of retailer brand substitution.

Consumers are more likely to hold favorable perceptions of the new retailer brand when they have positive attitudes toward retailer brand substitution. Improved perceptions of the new retailer brand are expected to foster positive behavioral intentions. In other words, a mediating relationship may exist between an individual's attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral intentions. This was supported by Keller (1999), who showed that a successful substitution strategy can enhance brand image and additionally encourage brand adoption when customers have a favorable attitude toward brand substitution. Indeed, attitudes are among the key factors influencing consumer behavior (Foroudi et al., 2021; Rather, 2021). Given that attitude could directly affect revisit intentions, it prompts consideration of whether, in the case of a retailer brand name substitution, perceptions of the new retailer brand should be regarded as a mediator between attitude and revisit intentions.

Another crucial factor that can profoundly impact customer attitudes and perceptions is the perceived similarity between the original retailer brand and the new one (Ahmed & Ben Rached, 2024). An individual's knowledge, attitude, and perception will change from a highly familiar retailer brand to a less familiar one in proportion to the degree of similarity between the old and the new retailer brands (Collange, 2015). Perceived similarity is the result of subjective judgments about brands, aiding consumers in classifying, comparing, and differentiating between brands. It plays a role in forming attitudes and perceptions about the brand via cognitive processes (Baker et al., 2002). This notion has been acknowledged in the literature as one of the pivotal success factors in brand strategies.

For instance, research on brand extensions indicates that when customers perceive some similarities with the parent brand, they tend to view the extension more positively (Czellar, 2003; Völckner & Sattler, 2006). In other words, when there is an important level of similarities between an extended brand and its parent brand, customers who appreciate a brand's original products are more likely to see the expanded brand of products favorably. On the other hand, people who dislike a brand's original products may react unfavorably toward the new extended products. Moreover, Collange (2008) and Descotes and Mogos Delassus (2015) show that one of the crucial elements in the success of brand substitution is the perceived similarity between the two brands. For example, Collange (2015) demonstrates that favorable assessments and intents to buy the product are encouraged when there is a significant degree of similarity between the initial and new brands. Other research indicates that the most attached customers can only tolerate changes to their brands when there is a significant degree of similarity between the initial and new brands. For example, as per Pimentel and Heckler (2003), attached customers are only willing to accept changes if they are minor enough to enable them to embrace the new brand.

Finally, when attached customers are confronted with a change in their preferred retailer brand and can perceive a significant and notable similarity between the two brands, they may more easily transfer their prior experiences or perceptions of the initial retailer brand to the new one, which may reduce negative feelings due to brand inconsistency or substitution.

This study was conducted to explore how consumers' attitudes toward retailer brand substitution were influenced by their attachment status before the retailer brand was substituted.

Drawing from prior study findings and the creation of the research model (Figure 1), the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: *Attachment to the old retailer brand exerts a negative influence on consumers' attitudes toward brand substitution.*

H2: *Attachment to the old retailer brand exerts a negative influence on consumers' perception of brand substitution.*

H3: *Attitude toward retailer brand substitution positively influences consumers' perception after the change.*

H4a: *Attitude toward retailer brand substitution positively influences customers' revisit intentions.*

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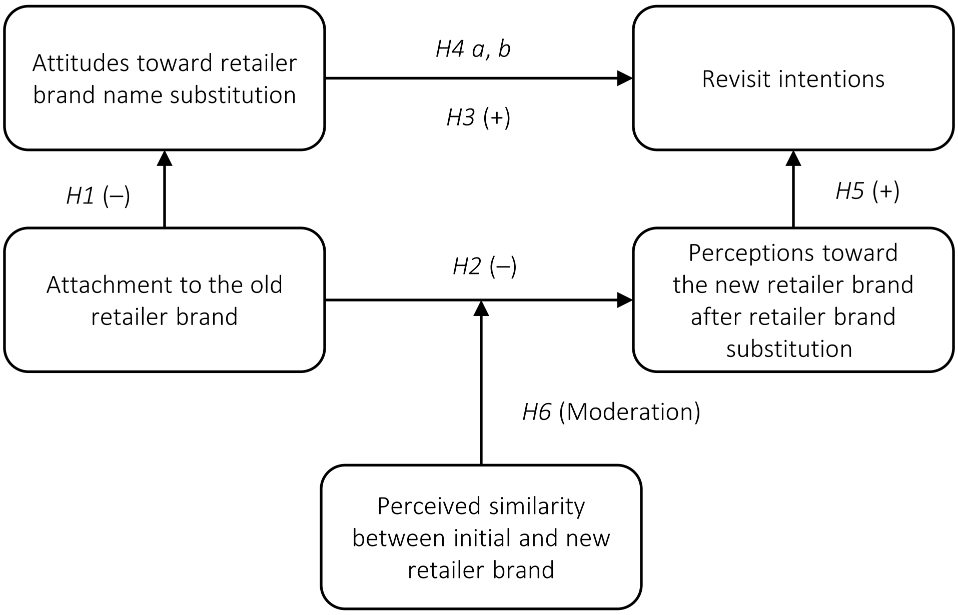

Figure 1. Research framework

H4b: *There should be a mediation between the attitude toward retailer brand name substitution and revisiting intentions through the customers' perception of the new retailer brand.*

H5: *The perception of the new retailer brand positively influences customers' revisit intentions.*

H6: *When the perceived similarity between the old and new retailer brands is high (low), attached consumers seem to have more (less) favorable perceptions of the new retailer brand.*

2. METHODOLOGY

The current investigation delves into a survey conducted in Tunisia, centering on a notable occurrence within the agri-food retail sector: the substitution of the retailer brand name Promogro with MG (Magasin Général). This transition is part of the MG group's strategic objective to diversify its offerings and better cater to its customers' daily needs. The switch entails a significant transformation in brand perception and policies, encompassing alterations in brand positioning and pricing strategies. This change was particularly risky due to its association with a radical change, implemented immediately following a 30-day closure period. Moreover, MG neglected to inform customers about the change, leading to difficulties in consumer comprehension regarding the rationale behind replacing the longstanding Promogro brand name.

The study targeted consumers who regularly patronize supermarkets (both Promogro and MG) in two prominent Tunisian cities, Tunis and Sfax. A questionnaire was meticulously designed to gather data, which were then administered to a sample of Promogro and MG clientele, resulting in the acquisition of 351 completed questionnaires. A thorough analysis of the literature served as the foundation for the development of the survey tool. An extensive review of existing literature served as the basis for crafting the survey instrument. The variables were assessed using Likert scales ranging from one ("strongly disagree") to five ("strongly agree"), utilizing established metrics for operationalization. Furthermore, the research model underwent evaluation via structural equation modeling (SEM), with measurement models constructed for test validity and reliability using AMOS22 software.

3. RESULTS

To identify factor loading patterns for each measurement model, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Each construct exhibits a Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.7. Subsequently, confirmatory analysis was conducted using the maximum likelihood (ML) method to estimate parameters based on the covariance matrix between each indicator, employing AMOS 22. As recommended by Kline (2023), absolute, incremental, and parsimonious fit indices were used to assess the adequacy of the measurement model. The overall measurement model indicated a satisfactory fit (X^2: 2.241; AGFI: 0.911; GFI: 0.914; RMSEA: 0.053; RMR: 0.044; CFI: 0.942; NFI: 0.91). Each scale was considered a first-order factor; the only exception was the consumer›s perception after the retailer brand substitution, which was considered a second-order factor. By averaging the factor items, the values of each of the four components of consumers' perception after the change were determined. The factor values were then used to evaluate unidimensionality.

Additionally, the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments were assessed using Jöreskog's Rho, as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The Jöreskog's Rho coefficient values are displayed in Table 2, indicating acceptability as they surpass the suggested minimum threshold of 0.7. Furthermore, the convergent validity criteria were met, with average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.5. Table 2 also demonstrates that the established criteria for discriminant validity were satisfied, as the average variance extracted exceeded the square of the correlation between the latent variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1. Description of the sample

Categories	N	%
Gender		
Male	148	42.16
Female	203	57.84
Age		
25-35 years old	44	12.53
36-45 years old	103	29.34
46-56 years old	141	40.17
≥ 60 years old	63	17.96
Household income (per month)		
Low (<200€)	37	10.54
Medium1 (300-450€)	192	54.70
Medium2 (450-750€)	108	30.78
High (>750€)	14	03.98
Graduate education		
High school or less	68	19.37
College education	137	39.03
Master/Ph.D.	98	27.92
Others	48	13.67

Note: N = 351.

A structural equation model was estimated using AMOS 22 to investigate the proposed correlations between the constructs. The data were satisfactorily fitted by the model: X^2 = 488.51, df = 235, p < 0.001; RMSEA = 0.061; CFI = 0.916; TLI = 0.92; X^2 / df = 2.078, and CAIC = 963.63. After confirming that the suggested model adequately fit the data, hypothesis testing was proceeded with. Standardized coefficients (β) were used to evaluate direct effects, and indirect effects were examined using the Process macro in SPSS, developed by Preacher and Hayes (2004).

There was a negative relationship between customers' attachment to the old retailer brand before retailer brand substitution and their attitudes about retailer brand substitution (β = –0.09*, p < 0.01). In other words, consumers who have a stronger attachment to the retailer brand before the retailer brand substitution tend to react less positively to the retailer brand substitution. Thus, *H1* is validated (Table 3).

Furthermore, the findings show no statistically significant correlation between consumer perceptions of the retailer brand after the change and attachment to the old retailer brand before the change (β = 0.02, p > 0.05, n.s.). This means that consumers who were more emotionally attached to the old retailer brand may not have had any impact on perceptions of that retailer brand, either positively or negatively. Therefore, *H2* was rejected.

Customers' perceptions of the retailer brand were statistically significantly impacted by their attitudes toward retailer brand substitution (β = 0.439**, p < 0.01), as shown in Table 3. The result clearly confirms *H3*, which suggests that customer perceptions of the new retailer brand will improve in proportion to how well they respond to the retailer brand substitution strategy. The results also indicate that customers' attitudes toward retailer brand substitution were associated with negative revisit intentions after the change (β = –0.204**, p < 0.001). In other words, the less favorable attitudes toward the change, the lower the consumers' revisit intentions. The impact of customers' attitudes toward retailer brand substitution on their revisit intentions was assessed while controlling for the effect of retailer brand perceptions. Therefore, *H4a* was not validated. Moreover, Table 3 illustrates a strong relationship between revisit intentions and retailer brand perceptions. This

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Table 2. Validation analysis: Convergence and discrimination tests

Construct / Items	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Jöreskog's Rho	AVE	Discriminant validity
Attachment					
ATTCH1	0.831	0.914	0.925	0.712	0.712 > δ^2 ATTCH – ATTI = 0.46 0.712 > δ^2 ATTCH – SIM = 0.35 0.712 > δ^2 ATTCH – REIN = 0.33 0.712 > δ^2 ATTCH – PAFR = 0.30
ATTCH2	0.806				
ATTCH3	0.880				
ATTCH4	0.831				
ATTCH5	0.870				
Attitude					
ATTI1	0.820	0.812	0.830	0.619	0.619 > δ^2 ATTI – ATTCH = 0.38 0.619 > δ^2 ATTI – SIM = 0.35 0.619 > δ^2 ATTI – REIN = 0.28 0.619 > δ^2 ATTI – PAFR = 0.22
ATTI2	0.780				
ATTI3	0.760				
Perceived similarity					
SIM1	0.840	0.884	0.909	0.769	0.769 > δ^2 SIM – ATTCH = 0.36 0.769 > δ^2 SIM – ATTCI = 0.29 0.769 > δ^2 SIM – REIN = 0.26
SIM2	0.900				
SIM3	0.890				
Revisit intention					
REIN1	0.844	0.816	0.891	0.671	0.671 > δ^2 REIN – ATTCH = 0.19 0.671 > δ^2 REIN – ATTCI = 0.27 0.671 > δ^2 REIN – SIM = 0.41 0.671 > δ^2 REIN – PAFR = 0.18
REIN2	0.798				
REIN3	0.801				
REIN4	0.832				
Perception after retailer brand substitution					
PAFR1	0.840	0.841	0.945	0.656	0.656 > δ^2 PAFR – ATTCH = 0.49 0.656 > δ^2 PAFR – ATTCI = 0.42 0.656 > δ^2 PAFR – SIM = 0.44 0.656 > δ^2 PAFR – REIN = 0.39
PAFR2	0.810				
PAFR3	0.790				
PAFR4	0.860				
PAFR5	0.870				
PAFR6	0.830				
PAFR7	0.740				
PAFR8	0.790				
PAFR9	0.750				

result validates *H5*. In other words, consumers who view a new retail brand more favorably are more likely to plan to revisit it after the change.

As observed in Table 3, the analysis validates the mediation of the effect of customers' attitudes toward the change on their revisit intentions by the retailer brand perceptions after the change (β = 0.29**, confidence interval [0.17; 0.51]). Attitudes toward retailer brand substitution have a direct and negative impact on revisit intentions. Thus, the mediation found can be described as competitive me-

Table 3. Analysis of fit indices, standardized coefficients, and hypotheses testing

Hypotheses and paths	Estimates (β)	Results
Direct effects (standardized measures)		
H1: Attachment to the old retailer brand → Attitudes toward retailer brand substitution	– 0.09*	Validated
H2: Attachment to the old retailer brand → Retailer brand perceptions after retailer brand substitution	$0.204^{n.s}$	Not validated
H3: Attitudes toward retailer brand substitution → Retailer brand perceptions after retailer brand substitution	0.439**	Validated
H4a: Attitudes toward retailer brand substitution → Revisit intentions	–0.204**	Not validated
H5: Retailer brand perceptions after retailer brand substitution → Revisit intentions	0.391**	Validated
Indirect effects (bootstrap estimates)		
H4b: Attitudes toward retailer brand substitution → Retailer brand perceptions after retailer brand substitution → Revisit intentions	0.29 * [0.17 ; 0.51]	Validated

Note: **p*, 0.01, ***p*, 0.001. (X^2)= 489:11; (df) = 231; (*p*-value) = *p*, 0.001. RMSEA = 0.069; TLI = 0.90; CFI = 0.95; (X^2/ df) = 2.117.

Table 4. Chi-square test results

H6	χ2	ddl	Δχ2	Δddl	Sign.
Constrained model	187.047	81	–	–	–
Free model	136.454	63	50.593	18	0.000

Table 5. Moderating impact of perceived similarity

Groups	Group 1: Low perceived similarity			Group 2: High perceived similarity		
H3b	Standardized coefficients β	CR	p	Standardized Coefficients β	CR	p
Retailer brand perceptions after the change ← Perceived attachment toward store brand	–0.178	1.503	**	0.226	2.329	**

Note: Significant at: **p*, 0.01, ***p*, 0.001.

diation with the existing direct effect, according to Zhao et al. (2010). Hence, *H4b* was validated.

To examine the moderating role of perceived similarity on the relationship between customers' attachment before retailer brand substitution and their perceptions after the change, a complete invariance multiple-group analysis was conducted (Roussel et al., 2002). Two distinct groups were identified (Low perceived brand similarity versus High perceived brand similarity) using dynamic clouds classification (k-means) (Vo & Jolibert, 2005). Subsequently, to verify if perceived brand similarity has a moderating effect in each relationship, the Chi-square difference test is used. The study compares between groups and studies the specificity of moderating effects in the case of test significance.

Table 4 shows a significant chi-square mean difference ($\Delta\chi 2 = 50.593$, $p < 0.05$) between the two models. This suggests that perceived brand similarity might moderate the influence on perceptions of the new retailer brand and perceived attachment. Consistent with these results, *H6* was confirmed. Thus, it can be inferred that customers' perceived attachment to the retailer brand before retailer brand substitution and their perceptions of the retailer brand after retailer brand substitution are moderated by perceived brand similarity.

Table 5 shows that the impact of perceived attachment on the perceptions of the retailer brands before the change becomes more positive ($\beta = 0.226$, $p = 0.00$) when there is a high perceived brand similarity between the two retailer brands and negative ($\beta = -0.178$, $p = 0.00$) when there is a low perceived brand similarity. Thus, after retailer brand substitution, the influence of customers' perceived retailer brand attachment on the retailer brand perceptions is positively moderated by perceived brand similarity.

4. DISCUSSION

The empirical results validate that consumers' attitudes toward retailer brand substitution are negatively impacted by their attachment to the old retailer brand before the change. Consumers with stronger attachments tend to exhibit less favorable reactions to retailer brand substitution, while those with weaker attachments appear to have more positive attitudes toward the change. Indeed, consumers often establish a trusting relationship with a retail brand they have known for a long time. A retailer brand substitution can be perceived as a breach of this trust, as the new retailer brand has not had the opportunity to demonstrate its reliability or service quality. In such instances, consumers may exhibit significant resistance to change, particularly when substituting an old retailer brand with a new one. This resistance can originate from emotional attachment to the existing retailer brand and the memories associated with it or from the fear of the unknown. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Collange (2015), who also found a negative correlation between consumer attachment and retailer brand substitution.

Moreover, the results suggest no statistically significant correlation between consumer attachment to the old retailer brand and their perceptions af-

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ter the substitution. The postulated hypothesis (*H2*) is rejected. This suggests that although emotional attachment to a retail brand exists, its impact on the transition to a new retail brand may not be as significant as assumed. Consumers may exhibit more flexibility and openness to change than initially anticipated. In other words, the lack of significance also implies that the emotional or psychological connection with the old retailer brand did not play a decisive role in how attached consumers perceive the new retailer brand. This observation may point toward the existence of other unmeasured or unaccounted variables (such as service quality, price, advertising, or other tangible aspects) in the study that might influence the new retailer's brand perception. This highlights the significance of considering a broad range of factors in studies of this nature.

One of the primary determinants of new retailer brand perceptions after the change was customers' attitudes toward the change. The results show that customer attitudes have a favorable and significant influence on the consumer's perceptions after the substitution. This implies that customers with positive attitudes toward retailer brand substitution are inclined to share their favorable experiences with others. This sharing can influence the public's perception of the new retailer brand and bolster its positive reputation. These findings support the conclusions of Martinez et al. (2008) concerning brand extension and advertising. They suggest that positive attitudes toward these strategies have the potential to translate into favorable attitudes and enhanced perceptions of the advertised or extended brand. This study supports this perspective, indicating that attitudes toward retailer brand substitution can be a crucial factor in enhancing customers' perceptions of a new retailer brand.

The results also show that revisit intentions are positively and significantly impacted by perceptions of the new retailer brand after the change. Essentially, when consumers form a favorable perception of the new retailer brand, it significantly motivates their consideration to return. This implies that the positive perception of the new retailer brand plays a vital role in shaping consumers' willingness to revisit the store or associated services. In other words, a positive perception of the new retailer brand creates a favorable disposition among consumers, prompting them to come back and maintain an ongoing relationship with the retailer brand. These findings align with Cobb-Walgren et al.'s (1995) work on brand extension, illustrating how customer perceptions and behavioral intentions toward an extended brand are positively correlated. The findings confirm the conclusions previously expressed about retailer brand substitution.

Moreover, it was expected that customers' attitudes toward the retailer brand substitution process would directly and positively influence their intentions to revisit. However, the results, contrary to expectations, reveal that the revisit intentions are directly and negatively impacted by customers' attitudes after the change. This unexpected outcome might be attributed to the radical nature of the change implemented by the company. When a substitution lacks sufficient communication, it can evoke unfavorable reactions from customers. The perception of the new retailer brand identity, coupled with a dearth of explanatory information, can breed mistrust, confusion, or even rejection among consumers. These adverse reactions can directly shape customers' attitudes toward the retailer brand, resulting in reduced trust, disappointment with the changes, or a sense of disorientation. Consequently, customers may be discouraged from returning to the store. Ultimately, a radical change without transparent communication can significantly influence consumer attitudes, affecting their intention to revisit. Despite its surprising nature, this finding is consistent with the observations of Fazio (2014), who noted that the connection between attitude and behavior is consistently shaped by various factors, including situational elements, personal variables, and individuals' cognitive perceptions.

Certainly, the impact of customers' attitudes toward retailer brand substitution on their intentions to revisit was evaluated, taking into account and controlling for the influence of retailer brand perceptions ($\beta = 0.29^{**}$, confidence interval [0.17; 0.51]). This suggests that predicting customers' revisit intentions should involve considering their perceptions of the new retailer brand rather than relying solely on measuring consumer attitudes toward retailer brand substitution. The study indicates that customers' perceptions of a new retailer brand play a crucial role in translating positive substitution attitudes into intentions to revisit. This finding is consistent with MacKenzie et al. (1986), who demonstrated that in the context of advertising studies, cognitive perception serves as a mediator in the relationship between consumer attitude and behavioral intentions.

This study considers perceived brand similarity as a pure moderator since the perceived similarity between the initial and new brands was not associated with customer attachment to the initial retailer brand or perceptions of the new retailer brand. The findings show that perceived retailer brand similarity positively moderates the correlation between consumer attachment and perceptions of the new retailer brand. This means that when there is a substantial level of similarity between the initial retailer brand and the new one, clients who had a stronger connection before the retailer brand substitution are more likely to have more positive perceptions of the new retailer brand. On the other hand, when there is a minor similarity between the initial retailer brand and the new one, these customers are probably to have negative perceptions about the new retailer brand. These findings align with the conclusions of Gotsi and Andriopoulos (2007) and Miller et al. (2014), who argue that retailer brand substitution should preserve a relationship between the old retailer brand and the new one rather than deviating significantly from the brand's heritage.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to understand how consumers evaluate retailer brand substitution strategies, focusing on attitudinal responses and perceptions of new retailer brands. It explores the mediating role of consumers' perceptions of the new brand and the moderating influence of perceived similarity. The results have shown that consumers' attachment to the old retail brand impact consumer's attitude toward the brand substitution negatively and significantly. Furthermore, perceptions of the retailer brand emerged as a significant mediating factor influencing the relationship between attitudes and consumers' intention to revisit the new retailer brand. Additionally, the study found that the association between consumer attachment and perceptions of the new retailer brand is positively moderated by perceived similarity.

Indeed, the results provide empirical support, suggesting that perceived brand similarity and customer attachment to the old retail brand may play pivotal roles in shaping these assessments. Typically, clients not attached to the old retailer brand generally react more positively to changes than those who are. It is evident that non-attached customers display greater tolerance toward retailer brand modifications. To maintain customer satisfaction and foster enduring relationships, marketers should acquire a thorough understanding of the expectations of attached customers and adjust tolerance levels accordingly when implementing a retailer brand substitution strategy.

Furthermore, the results have shown that the perceived similarity can help attached customers in establishing a connection between the two retailer brands. This process enables customers to transition their attitudes from the old brand to the new one in the context of retailer brand substitution. Marketers can glean that perceived brand similarity stands out as one of the most crucial factors in formulating successful retailer brand substitution strategies targeted at attracting attached customers. An effective retailer brand substitution plan should prioritize retaining attached clients by conveying the continuity of the new retailer brand with the one they are accustomed to rather than solely concentrating on acquiring new ones.

It additionally emerged that attitudes toward retailer brand substitution and revisit intentions may be mediated by retailer brand perceptions. The paper suggests that companies should also assess the potential for enhancing the retailer brand after the implementation of retailer brand substitution strategies. Customers' attitudes to retailer brand substitution are insufficient. To convince and motivate customers to return to the new retailer, marketers must also ensure that retailer brand substitution may improve customer perceptions of the retailer brand.

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